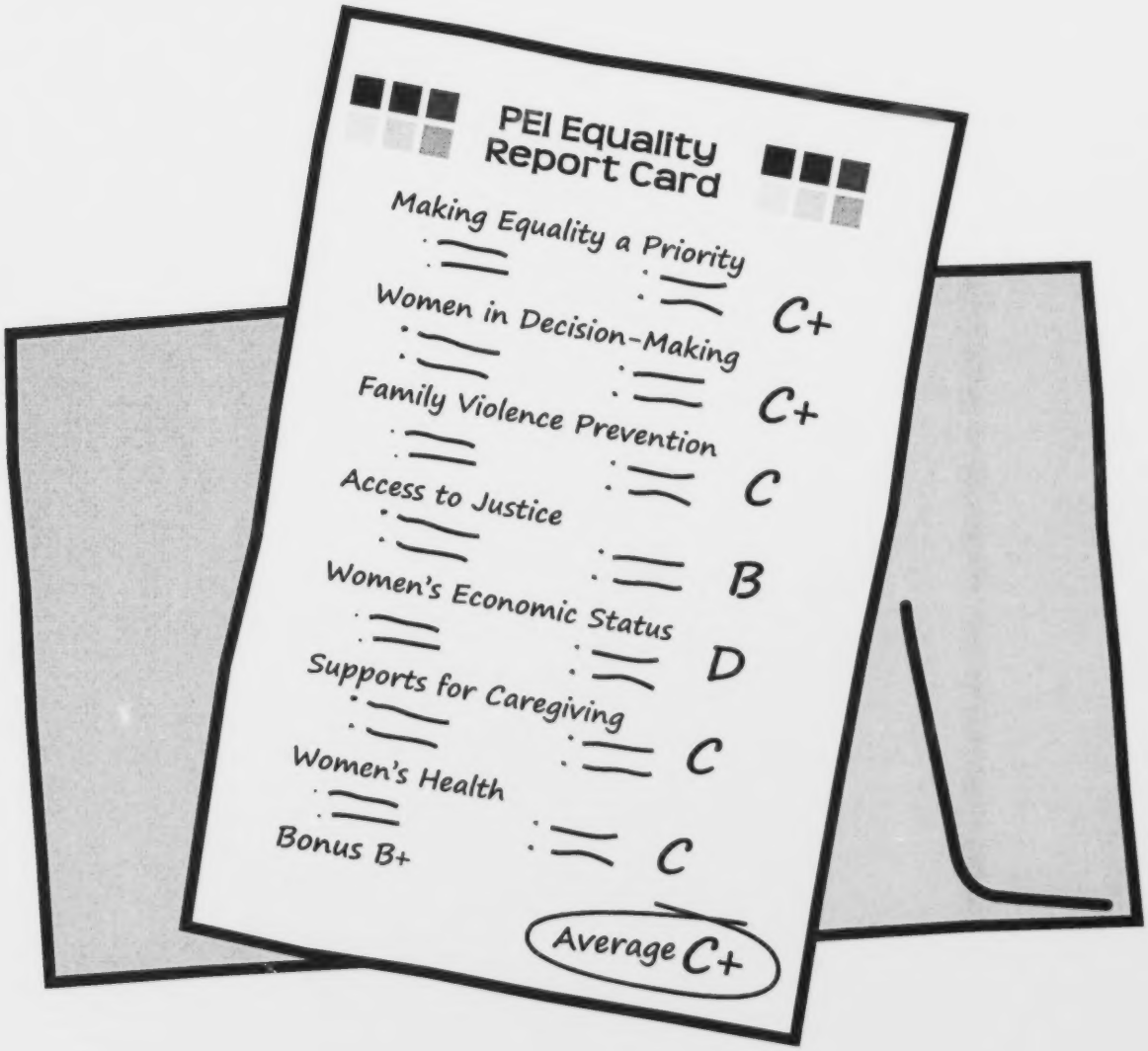
Prince Edward Island
Advisory Council on the Status of Women

# PEI Equality Report Card




June 2008

# Introduction

During the 2007 election, the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women introduced its plan for an EQUALITY REPORT CARD for PEI. The Report Card is a new process to assess our Province's progress towards women's equality goals. The Status of Women's goal was to work collaboratively with government to help the Province to achieve high grades in all priority areas.

## A Fair and Collaborative Process

How the Equality Report Card process worked:

- Members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women reviewed recommendations they had made to government over the past seven years. They selected issues and recommendations that continued to be of highest priority.
- PEI Status of Women published an introduction to the Report Card. The introduction outlined priorities for action and suggested the kinds of initiatives that would result in high grades for government.
- PEI Status of Women staff invited each department of government and each provincial political party to appoint a representative to have input into the Report Card process.
- Departmental representatives attended an orientation session and then completed a questionnaire about actions their department had taken to support women's equality and diversity.
- Members of the Advisory Council used information from departments and from their own research and experience to select grades in each priority area.
- PEI Status of Women staff shared these draft grades with government and opposition representatives for corrections, updates, and other input.
- Members of the Advisory Council shared draft grades with community members and community organizations for corrections, updates, and other input.
- Members of the Advisory Council made any changes they felt were necessary to the grades, based on feedback from government and community.
- PEI Status of Women staff finalized and released the Equality Report Card.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
Advisory Council on the Status of
WOMEN

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Assessments based on information
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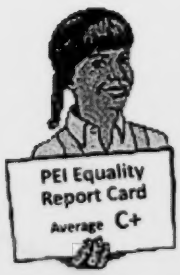
# Assessment

| Category | Grade |
|---|---|
| **Making Equality a Priority** | C+ |
| **Women in Decision-Making** | C+ |
| **Family Violence Prevention** | C |
| **Access to Justice** | B |
| **Women's Economic Status** | D |
| **Supports for Caregiving** | C |
| **Women's Health** | C |
| **Bonus:** Collaborating for Equality and Supporting Diversity and Inclusion | B+ |
| **Overall Average** | **C+** |




***This is a good mark that could still be better. Government has taken small but real steps to act on women's equality issues, with lots of potential for improvement — especially given government's signs of willingness to consult, collaborate, and include community-based organizations and under-represented voices in its decision-making.***

# MAKING EQUALITY A PRIORITY: C+

## A higher profile for the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women — A-

▲ Minister Valerie Docherty is doing a great job bringing profile to her role as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. At the budget table, she preserved provincial grant programs to community non-profit women's organizations in support of their equality work. Without prompting, she has approached women's organizations for the information she needs to make informed decisions on issues that arise. Her personal commitment to preventing family violence has blossomed in the past year, and we fully expect it to bear fruit, in the form of support for programs and services for people who experience violence and fear of violence.

## Issues of particular concern to women and their families reflected explicitly in government public statements and documents — D

▼ Women are mentioned rarely, if ever, in the Speech from the Throne, the Budget Address, or other key statements of public policy. This is nothing new, but there are few signs of it changing. Going forward, it will be important for government to take women into account when planning for economic development.

➤ The "Prosperity Agenda," with its focus on science and technology, promises great development for the Island. But careful planning will be needed to make sure women benefit equally from this strategy, since there's already a gap between women and men in education in some sciences and some aspects of technology. As a province, we have to make sure the gap between men's and women's wages isn't deepened.

➤ Highlighting "Rural Development" in a revamped department is a potentially positive step for community-based economic development. Efforts to revitalize rural PEI must meaningfully include women. Many rural communities have suffered due to outmigration of men. It is often women who are left behind to take care of the family and community. The province needs to engage the caring, commitment, and creativity of its rural women.

## Commitment to applying gender- and diversity-based analysis (GBA) throughout government — B-

▲ Minister Docherty's motion to set up a committee on best practices in gender-based analysis (a tool for assessing how proposed policies may affect women and men differently) is a step in the right direction. We look forward to it passing in the fall sitting.

▲ Departments including Social Services and Seniors, Agriculture, and Education are already applying what they know about males' and females' different needs in some policy-making. The PEI Office of the Attorney General is doing nation-leading work on women's and girls' safety within the National Crime Prevention Centre planning. Government uses its Diversity Equity Policy and Program as a signal of commitment to diversity and equity goals.

▼ Our government is already part of international agreements that commit them to taking gender into account. It's past time for action to make gender a systematic part of government planning. Government needs to move beyond declarations, towards action-oriented policies and procedures, programs, and legislation.



***Making Equality a Priority: A mix of positive steps to push equality forward and old attitudes that hold equality back.***

# WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING: C+

## Increased equality in appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions — B

▲ The new "Participate in PEI" process is having positive results moving towards its goal of "equal participation by all Islanders." So far, more than 40% of the new government's appointments have gone to women. There have been some good efforts to recruit women to non-traditional roles on boards.

▲ A promising new "Special Committee on the Role of the MLA" will take a multi-party approach to redefining the role of the MLA, as government moves past the patronage era, with a focus on MLAs' roles as facilitators.

▼ Next step needed: Strategies to build trust in the new system and to improve the number of women and people from under-represented groups who put their names forward for agencies, boards, and commissions. Given continued inequality, this will not happen "naturally." Self-nomination is not working on its own and must be balanced with recruitment strategies.

## Appointment of a strong complement of women to Executive Council — D

▼ Only two women out of ten members of Executive Council is too few. And while it's great to have a woman elected as Speaker of the Legislature, this also takes her voice out of debate on the floor. Another indicator: only a quarter of government-appointed Deputy Ministers are women.

▲ On the positive side, the Chairperson of the Deputy Ministers' Council is a woman.

## Commitment to ongoing electoral reforms leading to proportional representation — C-

▼ There have been no real steps on this priority, just a renewed commitment to fixed election dates preceded by audited financial statements.

▲ The new Office of Public Engagement promises to find new ways to "share government," with an explicit goal to reduce barriers to women in our electoral and legislative systems by working more collaboratively and less adversarially. We ask that they start by engaging equality-seeking organizations to help shape the Office's vision and begin the work.

▼ Government yet again passed up the chance to improve the schedule for sittings in the Legislature, despite input from women's groups. This means the sitting schedule is still based on the passenger train schedule and doesn't accommodate today's family or community schedules.

## A new, unanticipated multi-partisan Women's Caucus — B+

▲ This is a positive woman-led initiative. With or without membership expanded to include women support staff in legislative offices (as the Opposition recommends), we want to see this initiative continue, and we look forward to seeing what they do.

***Women in Decision-Making: Some initiatives for positive change, but little change at the highest levels or in the biggest systems.***

# FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION: C

## Actions to implement the recommendations of the Justice Options for Women project — C+

▲ So far, we've seen additional Victim Services staff made permanent, and we've seen enhanced safety in waiting rooms in all provincial courthouses. These are small but significant actions from 2001 to 2004 Justice Options project recommendations.
▲ The signs of further steps towards a domestic violence court option are a really positive development. More announcements and details, please.
▼ Specific timelines and workplans for action towards implementing Justice Options recommendations are still too far in the future for families in crisis now.

## Continued tangible support for Transition House Association (THA) and the Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Centre to flourish as community-based, women-led organizations — C

▲ This past year, THA received additional support to assist in organizational and governance reviews, especially in making THA a provincewide organization. Rape Crisis received one-time funding for public education and one-year support for cost-of-living increases. All this is much appreciated, but investments like these need to be ongoing.
▲ Government deserves kudos for funding support for the Aboriginal Women's Association family violence prevention work, through the Interministerial Women's Secretariat, and for core funding for this group through Communities, Cultural Affairs, and Labour (and formerly through the Office of the Attorney General).
▲ Council values the community consultations on the Child Protection Act, and we're looking forward to recommendations from this review.
▼ THA and Rape Crisis are front-line service groups that need consistent funding to allow them to fulfill their mandates. Their grants from the provincial government need to be indexed to the cost of living so they do not fall behind in their ability to provide services.
▼ Organizational and governance reviews of THA are taking too long. Government needs to support a short timeframe for THA to allow community members to wrap up the governance review, set up a process to hire a permanent Executive Director, improve salaries and benefits for front-line staff, and ensure the mandate appropriately matches women's needs for crisis interventions with ongoing support through Outreach Services.

## Increased application of existing Woman Abuse Protocols, with more protocols developed as needed — C

▲ The budget boost to Child and Family Services, including Family Violence Prevention coordination, is welcome. Social Services is involved in important federal/provincial/territorial work on elder abuse. A memorandum of understanding between Child and Family Services and the RCMP to enhance information sharing on child protection and family violence should have positive effects. And the position of the Family Violence Coordinator is being advertised, which is all good news.
▼ There is still a great need for ongoing training on Woman Abuse Protocols, and there is little measurement of how often or how well existing protocols are being used. Youth continue to be a vulnerable group to abuse, with few specific protocols in place to protect them and little training for service providers that looks at their particular risks and needs. We're hoping for new Woman Abuse Protocols to be developed for Child Protection and monitoring of existing protocols in Income Support, Hospital Emergency, and Justice.



***Family Violence Prevention: Small steps across the board on the defining issue of violence prevention.***

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE: B

## Efforts to collaborate with Federal, Provincial, and Territorial governments to improve access to family law legal aid — B

▲ The Atlantic Ministers Responsible for Justice placed federal funding for legal aid at the top of their priority list for 2007 federal/provincial/territorial meetings. PEI Ministers have always been vocal on this issue at national tables. A strong statement from the Attorney General in the Legislature in May reaffirms the Government's strong support for legal aid, particularly family legal aid.

▼ Atlantic Ministers will need to be truly creative in the strategies they use to move funding for legal aid, and especially family law legal aid, upwards on the federal agenda.

## Assistance to women and families to navigate family law systems and to access alternative dispute resolution (in cases where it would be appropriate) — B-

▲ There have been many positive steps within family law systems. Our Council office is hearing fewer concerns about the Maintenance Enforcement program, likely a result of additional workers in the system and streamlining of communications. Coordination and cooperation among departments is leading to more timely access to financial support programs for family law clients.

▲ Victim Services continues to be a significant support to women who need access to the justice and family law systems. Victim Services plays an important role in applying for Emergency Protection Orders on behalf of victims and advocating for priority placement for people who experience violence and abuse.

➤ Positive Parenting from Two Homes is another continued success story, though the Justice Options for Women project advocates for a specific parenting program developed for parents and extended family supporters who are in abusive relationships.

➤ Aboriginal justice is moving along well but still needs additional investment for additional staff and for promoting the Program, to encourage buy-in at all levels and to allow the program to expand to meet the needs and fulfill the promise of the Aboriginal Justice model.

▼ Divorce and other family law questions that bring women into contact with the justice and family law systems are especially problematic for women because women frequently have unequal power in their relationships and in society. Family law systems and alternative dispute resolutions need ongoing work, attention, and investment to ensure they continue to meet unequal women's needs.

## Improved access to family law legal aid lawyers — B

▲ Budget investment in family law legal aid, coupled with partnership support from the Law Foundation, promises enough to hire a new family law legal aid lawyer for the Summerside area and increase the number of referrals to outside counsel when that is required. We look forward to these commitments becoming concrete!

***Access to Justice: Concrete action on long-standing issues of access to family law legal aid. Hooray, and let there be more!***

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC STATUS: D

## Increased allotment of funds for direct payment to social services recipients to bring them up to a standard of living in which all basic needs are met — D

- This low grade is a reflection of where people in poverty score on the government's overall priority list. Everyone has the right to a livable income that affords them a good quality of life, whether their income is from wages, pensions, or other supports. No one has the right to decide who is entitled to live in dignity, free from cold and hunger. We know that the Minister of Social Services and Seniors has tried to call the federal government to account. We know that the Department has made improvements where they can and has tried to use well the resources allotted to their work. But the resources are inadequate. Even after a long winter and rising oil, fuel, and food costs that left people struggling, the Provincial Budget for the coming year barely keeps pace with current needs and actual spending from last year for people on social assistance.
- It's time for government to set consistent "low income" measurements. Some programs set $30,000 as the low income cut-off for households, while others set the bar at $40,000. If you're "poor" for one service, you're "poor" for another.

## Planning for investment in affordable housing, particularly in the province's largest municipalities, including housing designed to meet the needs of seniors — D

- Immediate action is needed on this file, but there is no apparent increase in investment in housing initiatives in the budget for next year; estimates barely keep up with actual costs from last year.
- The lack of available, affordable, appropriate, and universally accessible housing in Prince Edward Island is a crisis, just as it is across Canada. The aging population makes action more urgent. Research by the Atlantic Seniors' Housing Research Alliance shows that a fifth of PEI seniors live in dwellings built before 1946. Atlantic-wide, more senior women than senior men live in these older dwellings, and they are more likely to have lower incomes, more likely to not own their dwellings, and more likely to be separated or divorced.
- Adequate Disability Support is crucial to solving housing issues. Government is not providing enough funding for persons with disabilities to allow them to find appropriate housing and enjoy a good quality of life.
- Hand in hand with investment in housing, investment in Island-wide public transit is needed to make existing affordable housing more accessible.

**WOMEN'S ECONOMIC STATUS, *continued***

## Measures by government to provide leadership as an employer to women C-

▲ This year's initiative to promote literacy and learning in the public sector, "What are YOU learning this year?" gets high marks.
▲ The province's Equity and Diversity Policy acknowledges women in leadership/management as an under-represented group. Some departments are rising admirably well to the challenge of including diversity and equity in their human resource planning. There are positive signs that the new department of Innovation and Advanced Learning will use a gender lens in its planning, and this is vitally important.
▼ The number of women in senior positions still lags behind. The corporate culture is not changing fast enough to encourage women in leadership and still discounts and overlooks women's contributions.
▼ Women's role in primary production industries, such as fishing and farming, is much greater than recognized. When these primary industries are struggling, the specific effects on women are significant. Inadequate support for farming and fishing affects women economically, socially, and emotionally.
▼ Moving departments to new towns need to be looked at with a gender lens: the move may have disproportionate effects on women in terms of caregiving and transportation costs and responsibilities.
▼ Collective agreements tend to negotiate raises as percentages of salaries, which widens the gap between the highest and lowest salaries (and women on average have lower salaries than men).
▼ Public-sector unions remind us that delayed contract negotiations have a negative effect on many families, who have to wait for retroactive pay as they watch the cost of living go up. The unions want to see more casual jobs converted to permanent, and they also look forward to a push on health and safety and working alone policies to benefit women and all workers.
▼ Employment Standards are all that are available to protect non-unionized workers, and these are out of date and inadequate.

***Women's Economic Status: Supports for economically vulnerable women are mostly stagnant, even while stressful food and fuel costs grow.***

# SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVING: C

## Additional investment in early childhood care and education that increases quality, accessibility, affordability, and focus on child development — B

▲ Lots of positive movement shows increased government awareness of the importance of the early years. The move of Early Childhood Education into the Department of Education is good policy, and good news.
▲ Other good news includes additional investment in licensed child care centres to fund maintenance and to enhance care to children with special needs, increased kindergarten funding, new kindergarten curriculum with additional new investment in kindergarten science and social studies curriculum development, another pre-school Autism specialist, and expansion of the Best Start program to include children aged 18 to 24 months. These are all good strategies for preventing problems down the road.
▼ The focus of action recently has been on kindergarten-aged children, but early childhood care and education is very important for younger children and their parents, too. We join the Early Childhood Development Association in calling for an Early Childhood Development Commissioner to look at the care and development needs of all children in their early years.

## Modelling good practices as an employer of new parents and other caregivers — C

▲ There's good news in government's decision to provide better support and fewer barriers for social assistance recipients to work outside the home and break a cycle of poverty.
▲ We've heard good things from some women in senior roles in government about increased flexibility in their workplaces.
▲ In many public sector collective agreements, up to 10 days' leave for "taking care of family" are now negotiated.
▲ More departments seem to be thinking about and planning for healthy work/life balance for employees (Health's "Healthy Workplace Strategy" is an example).
➤ All across Canada, people are spending more time at work with less time for families and less time for volunteer and community opportunities, and this is affecting PEI workers, too.
▼ There's more to be done to support caregivers who work for government, including improved top-ups for caregiving leaves. Casual workers, especially, need to see change. When casuals miss one paid day in their work term, it can affect their EI cheques for the full time they are eligible to draw benefits.
▼ There's much to be done to communicate to community employers where employment standards should be set — but this is an important government responsibility in a province where there's a huge gap in wages and benefits between unionized and non-unionized workers.

SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVING, *continued*

## Initiatives to encourage or support private businesses to provide top-up payments and to continue medical, pension, and other benefits for parents on maternity, parental, or adoption leave — C-

▲ Council likes the look of the "Take 30 for the Family" social marketing campaign, as long as it translates into something positive in policy or programming and supports a vision of family that increases women's equality and fundamentally assists families that are struggling.
▲ We're pleased to see increased funds to foster families for the care of children, and commitment to addressing concerns about international adoption.
▼ Council is really looking for action to improve the Employment Standards Act. Changes to this legislation are urgently needed and are taking too long. Improvements recommended last year by a Review Panel (following public consultation) are good. We support them. We want now to see a public commitment to these positive changes, and introduction of updated legislation in the fall sitting.
▼ Going forward, it is government's responsibility to engage business in these questions, using a consultative and collaborative approach that helps encourage buy-in to beneficial changes.
▼ The minimum wage rate continues to be too low, and this affects the amount families receive in federal benefits when they take caregiving leaves.

## Consultation and planning with early-childhood educators for changes in early childhood care and education — D

▼ Government has mishandled the timing of changes to school-entry ages, and there are serious questions about the "transitioning" effects of integrating kindergarten into the school system and what this will mean for educators, their careers, and their businesses. Early childhood care and education matter to women as caregivers of young children, but they also matter to them as early childhood educators and as owner/operators of early childhood centres. Many of the investments in early childhood care and education are good for women as caregivers, but some of government's decisions may have negative effects for women as educators.
➤ Government has appointed a capable Public Kindergarten Commissioner (a former Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, in fact), but we have learned that consultation will focus on implementation strategies (delivery models and impacts). There were not and will be no consultations with educators on the decisions that were previously made.

# WOMEN'S HEALTH: C

## Steps towards whole-body holistic health — C

▲ We're hearing about positive steps towards family-centred care around birthing in hospitals, and multi-disciplinary team approaches that support holistic health in family health centres.
▲ The introduction of nurse practitioners to promote wellness, prevent chronic disease, and provide better access to services is welcome, and the budget boost to these health professionals is a good step.
➤ Council is generally pleased to see HPV vaccine available for girls but has heard concerns about the vaccine from women's health advocates and would like a plan to evaluate immunization over the next five years: Are there long-term side effects for girls' health? Should the vaccine be given to boys, too? Does immunity last or will a booster be needed?
▼ The focus of our health care system is still very much on acute care and medical models that look at bodies piece by piece (with private care for teeth, eyes, and most complementary medicine, for instance). For women's health, this means the focus is mostly still on reproductive health. (Even still, there remains no access to abortion in PEI hospitals.)
➤ We look forward to concrete steps towards regulating midwifery services and taking up recommendations from women's organizations for a birthing centre.
▼ Council wants to see immediate action on banning cosmetic pesticides, which we view as a crucial environmental health issue with special implications for women and children.

## Initiatives to provide appropriate, gender-specific mental health programming — D

▼ Mental Health services for both women and men are still under-resourced and under strain. The recent budget, with its multi-million dollar investment in health spending, offers no increased spending in Community Mental Health. This is very much an equality issue. We know that many women experience deep depressions or high anxiety partly as a result of the dealing with unreasonable expectations placed on them because they are women and are largely responsible for caring for children. Others suffer stresses and pressure because they are dealing with fallout from poverty and abuse, that are more likely to dog them because they are women.
➤ There is support for specialized services for sexual abuse survivors, though more is still needed. We know that the trauma of sexual abuse may have far-reaching consequences for mental health (depression, PTSD, and other anxiety symptoms), physical health, and addictions.
▲ There are some good things happening in addictions services, with a youth addiction strategy that involves community representatives and promises to look at young men's and young women's different needs.
▲ Women's addiction services are female-centred and appear to be progressive.
▼ Addressing the root causes of addiction and, especially, broadening models of treatment, must be more of a priority for government. We're hearing from community groups that there needs to be much better communication and coordination between Mental Health and Addictions. Depressed women are winding up on prescription medications that are addictive: women who need help in the form of counselling and support are instead getting medicated. Plus, there are too-short and inappropriate treatments for women who want to stop taking addictive prescription medications.

**WOMEN'S HEALTH, *continued***

## Recognition in government policy and planning of social determinants of health — C+

▲ Initial steps towards a Poverty Reduction Strategy for PEI are very positive, and the Minister of Social Services and Seniors' motion in the Legislature against poverty is a good sign. Income is the most important social determinant of health. Social inclusion and democratic inclusion and participation are also aspects of health that are affected by income. We look forward to a provincial anti-poverty strategy being developed through consultation and cooperation with community-based groups.

▲ The Department of Social Services and Seniors has been visible and engaged in community consultations and recognizes the importance of increased average pay levels and access to affordable child care as building blocks to women's health.

▲ Education is a major social determinant of health, so re-investment in public education and targetted support for things like school-based breakfast programs are also a plus. The Department of Health's initiatives have included the School Nutrition Policy and the Community Nutrition Program.

➤ The Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities curriculum and models of good practice are just one local example of an under-utilized, hiqh-quality resource to learn more about root causes of poor health.

▼ In government rhetoric and action, we see little recognition of the concept of social determinants of health. A cross-departmental, provincewide anti-poverty strategy is urgently needed to help broaden health policy development and health promotion beyond modifying individual behaviours (not smoking or drinking alcohol or using substances, eating healthfully, getting exercise). We need strategies that look at prevention in terms of economic, environmental, social, and cultural health, too.

## Major investments in breast cancer screening and mammography equipment — B

▲ Investments in breast cancer screening and digital mammography equipment get the thumbs up. Diabetic strips for insulin-dependent Islanders, part of a 14% increase in drug spending, will also make a big difference to lots of Islanders facing health challenges. If the focus is going to continue to be acute care, at least there's commitment to funding it.

***Women's Health: Government invests lots in fixing the worst that happens to bodies, but we need more that links body, mind, and spirit.***

# BONUS: B+

## Collaborating for Equality

**A-**

- *Working with the PEIACSW on this report card process in a positive, collaborative spirit*
- *Support for sustained or increased funding for women's organizations*
- *Efforts to collaborate with other governments/other levels of government to achieve women's equality goals, especially in the priority areas outlined above*

▲ All departments of government cooperated beyond expectation in the Equality Report Card process. This has led to enhanced awareness of the issues women say are priorities.
▲ Government's commitment to sustaining community-based women's organizations remains solid. And for the first time, government has provided grants to non-profit women's organizations in the community to do their important work.
▲ The Province's commitment to consulting with Aboriginal people and groups is continuing to improve.
▲ Government has sought public input on a wide array of significant social issues.
▲ The PEI government is doing strong and important work at the federal/provincial/territorial level to lobby for action on issues such as maternity and parental benefits, poverty, early childhood, family law legal aid, and crime prevention.

## Supporting Diversity and Inclusion

**B**

- *Efforts to formally include under-represented groups in decision-making*
- *Steps towards integrating diversity and inclusion goals into analysis, policies, planning, and programs alongside gender-based analysis*
- *Demonstration of willingness to work towards outcomes that ensure equality for all*

▲ Our Council sees the new government as genuinely struggling to reduce the system of political patronage that has held this province captive for generations and that is definitely bad for women. This is thankless work for any government, and they are unlikely to get credit from many quarters. As a result, there is still a long way to go to eliminate patronage from the PEI political system.
▲ Initiatives such as "Participate in PEI" and the new Office of Public Engagement have potential to change how the Province includes and listens to a more diverse range of citizens, including traditionally under-represented groups.
▼ Community groups suggest that the government has a lot to learn about the role of community organizations and the best ways to work with them on specific issues without being over-involved or under-involved. With so many reports from public consultations pending, we're waiting to see how well community consultation is integrated into decision-making.

***Bonus: Government has participated in this project in a collaborative spirit, and we expect ongoing positive results from collaboration.***

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